The Saga of Erik the Red

Translation: J. Sephton

Index

The Saga of Erik the Red

Chapter 1

Olaf, who was called Olaf the White, was styled a warrior king. He was the son of King Ingjald, the son of Helgi, the son of Olaf, the son of Gudred, the son of Halfdan Whiteleg, king of the Uplands (in Norway).

He led a harrying expedition of sea-rovers into the west, and conquered Dublin, in Ireland, and Dublinshire, over which he made himself king. He married Aud the Deep-minded, daughter of Ketil Flatnose, son of Bjorn the Ungartered, a noble man from Norway. Their son was named Thorstein the Red.

Olaf fell in battle in Ireland, and then Aud and Thorstein went into the Sudreyjar (the Hebrides). There Thorstein married Thorid, daughter of Eyvind the Easterling, sister of Helgi the Lean; and they had many children.

Thorstein became a warrior king, and formed an alliance with Earl Sigurd the Great, son of Eystein the Rattler. They conquered Caithness, Sutherland, Ross, and Moray, and more than half Scotland. Over these Thorstein was king until the Scots plotted against him, and he fell there in battle.

Aud was in Caithness when she heard of Thorstein’s death. Then she caused a merchant-ship to be secretly built in the wood, and when she was ready, directed her course out into the Orkneys. There she gave in marriage Thorstein the Red’s daughter, Gro, who became mother of Grelad, whom Earl Thorfinn, the Skullcleaver, married.

Afterwards Aud set out to seek Iceland, having twenty free men in her ship. Aud came to Iceland, and passed the first winter in Bjarnarhofn (Bjornshaven) with her brother Bjorn. Afterwards she occupied all the Dale country between the Dogurdara (day-meal river) and the Skraumuhlaupsa (river of the giantess’s leap), and dwelt at Hvamm. She had prayer meetings at Krossholar (Crosshills), where she caused crosses to be erected, for she was baptised and deeply devoted to the faith. There came with her to Iceland many men worthy of honour, who had been taken captive in sea-roving expeditions to the west, and who were called bondmen.

One of these was named Vifil; he was a man of high family, and had been taken captive beyond the western main, and was also called a bondman before Aud set him free. And when Aud granted dwellings to her ship’s company, Vifil asked why she gave no abode to him like unto the others. Aud replied, "That it was of no moment to him, for," she said, "he would be esteemed in whatever place he was, as one worthy of honour." She gave him Vifilsdalr (Vifilsdale), and he dwelt there and married. His sons were Thorbjorn and Thorgeir, promising men, and they grew up in their father’s house.

Chapter 2

There was a man named Thorvald, the son of Asvald, the son of Ulf, the son of Yxna-Thoris. His son was named Eirik. Father and son removed from Jadar (in Norway) to Iceland, because of manslaughters, and occupied land in Hornstrandir, and dwelt at Drangar.

There Thorvald died, and Eirik then married Thjodhild, daughter of Jorund, the son of Atli, and of Thorbjorg the Ship-breasted, whom afterwards Thorbjorn, of the Haukadalr (Hawkdale) family, married; he it was who dwelt at Eiriksstadr after Eirik removed from the north. It is near Vatzhorn.

Then did Eirik’s thralls cause a landslip on the estate of Valthjof, at Valthjofsstadr. Eyjolf the Foul, his kinsman, slew the thralls beside Skeidsbrekkur (slopes of the race-course), above Vatzhorn. In return Eirik slew Eyjolf the Foul; he slew also Hrafn the Dueller, at Leikskalar (playbooths). Gerstein, and Odd of Jorfi, kinsman of Eyjolf, were found willing to follow up his death by a legal prosecution; and then was Eirik banished from Haukadalr.

He occupied then Brokey and Eyxney, and dwelt at Tradir, in Sudrey, the first winter. At this time did he lend to Thorgest pillars for seat-stocks, Afterwards Eirik removed into Eyxney, and dwelt at Eiriksstadr. He then claimed his pillars, and got them not. Then went Eirik and fetched the pillars from Breidabolstadr, and Thorgest went after him. They fought at a short distance from the hay-yard at Drangar, and there fell two sons of Thorgest, and some other men.

After that they both kept a large body of men together. Styr gave assistance to Eirik, as also did Eyjolf, of Sviney, Thorbjorn Vifilsson, and the sons of Thorbrand, of Alptafjordr (Swanfirth). But the sons of Thord Gellir, as also Thorgeir, of Hitardalr (Hotdale), Aslak, of Langadalr (Longdale), and Illugi, his son, gave assistance to Thorgest.

Eirik and his people were outlawed at Thorsnes Thing. He prepared a ship in Eiriksvagr (creek), and Eyjolf concealed him in Dimunarvagr while Thorgest and his people sought him among the islands. Eirik said to his people that he purposed to seek for the land which Gunnbjorn, the son of Ulf the Crow, saw when he was driven westwards over the ocean, and discovered Gunnbjarnarsker (Gunnbjorn’s rock or skerry). He promised that he would return to visit his friends if he found the land. Thorbjorn, and Eyjolf, and Styr accompanied Eirik beyond the islands. They separated in the most friendly manner, Eirik saying that he would be of the like assistance to them, if he should be able so to be, and they should happen to need him.

Then he sailed oceanwards under Snæfellsjokull (snow mountain glacier), and arrived at the glacier called Blaserkr (Blue-shirt); thence he journeyed south to see if there were any inhabitants of the country.

He passed the first winter at Eiriksey, near the middle, of the Vestribygd (western settlement). The following spring he proceeded to Eiriksfjordr, and fixed his abode there. During the summer he proceeded into the unpeopled districts in the west, and was there a long time, giving names to the places far and wide. The second winter he passed in Eiriksholmar (isles), off Hvarfsgnupr (peak of disappearance, Cape Farewell); and the third summer he went altogether northwards, to Snæfell and into Hrafnsfjordr (Ravensfirth); considering then that he had come to the head of Eiriksfjordr, he turned back, and passed the third winter in Eiriksey, before the mouth of Eiriksfjordr.

Now, afterwards, during the summer, he proceeded to Iceland, and came to Breidafjordr (Broadfirth). This winter he was with Ingolf, at Holmlatr (Island-litter). During the spring, Thorgest and he fought, and Eirik met with defeat. After that they were reconciled. In the summer Eirik went to live in the land which he had discovered, and which he called Greenland, "Because," said he, "men will desire much the more to go there if the land has a good name."

Chapter 3

Thorgeir Vifilsson married, and took to wife Arnora, daughter of Einar, from Laugarbrekka (the slope of the hot spring), the son of Sigmund, the eon of Ketil-Thistil, who had occupied Thistilsfjordr.

The second daughter of Einar was named Hallveig. Thorbjorn Vifilsson took her to wife, and received with her the land of Laugarbrekka, at Hellisvollr (the cave-hill). To that spot Thorbjorn removed his abode, and became great and worshipful. He was the temple-priest, and had a magnificent estate. Thorbjorn’s daughter was Gudrid, the fairest of women, and of peerless nobility in all her conduct.

There was a man named Orm, who dwelt at Arnarstapi (eagle-rock), and he had a wife who was named Halldis. He was a well-to-do franklin, a great friend of Thorbjorn, and Gudrid lived at his house as his foster-child for a long time.

There was a man named Thorgeir, who dwelt at Thorgeirsfjall (fell). He was mighty rich in cattle, and had been made a freedman. He had a son, whose name was Einar, a handsome man, well mannered, and a great dandy. Einar, at this time, was a travelling merchant, sailing from land to land with great success; and he always passed his winter either in Iceland or in Norway.

Now after this, I have to tell how that one autumn, when Einar was in Iceland, he proceeded with his wares along Snæfellsnes, with the object of selling; he came to Arnarstapi; Orm invited him to stay there, and Einar accepted his invitation, because there was friendship between him and Orm’s people, and his wares were earned into a certain outhouse. There he unpacked his merchandise, showed it to Orm and the housemen, and bade Orm take therefrom such things as he would. Orm accepted the offer, and pronounced Einar to be a goodly gallant traveller, and a great favourite of fortune. When now they were busy with the wares, a woman passed before the door of the outhouse.

Einar inquired of Orm who that fair woman might be, passing before the door. "I have not seen her here before," said he.

"That is Gudrid, my foster-child," said Orm, "daughter of Thorbjorn the franklin, from Laugarbrekka."

"She must be a good match," said Einar; "surely she has not been without suitors who have made proposals for her, has she?"

Orm answered, "Proposals have certainly been made, friend, but this treasure is not to be had for the picking up; it is found that she will be particular in her choice, as well as also her father."

"Well, in spite of that," quoth Einar, "she is the woman whom I have it in my mind to propose for, and I wish that in this suit of mine you approach her father on my part, and apply yourself to plead diligently for me, for which I shall pay you in return a perfect friendship. The franklin, Thorbjorn, may reflect that our families would be suitably joined in the bonds of affinity; for he is a man in a position of great honour, and owns a fine abode, but his personal property, I am told, is greatly on the decrease; neither I nor my father lack lands or personal property; and if this alliance should be brought about, the greatest assistance would accrue to Thorbjorn."

Then answered Orm, "Of a surety I consider myself to be thy friend, and yet am I not willing to bring forward this suit, for Thorbjorn is of a proud mind, and withal a very ambitious man."

Einar replied that he desired no other thing than that his offer of marriage should be made known. Orm then consented to undertake his suit, and Einar journeyed south again until he came home.

A while after, Thorbjorn had a harvest-feast, as he was bound to have because of his great rank. There were present Orm, from Arnarstapi, and many other friends of Thorbjorn.

Orm entered into conversation with Thorbjorn, and told him how that Einar had lately been to see him from Thorgeirsfjall, and was become a promising man. He now began the wooing on behalf of Einar, and said that an alliance between the families would be very suitable on account of certain interests. "There may arise to thee, franklin," he said, "great assistance in thy means from this alliance."

But Thorbjorn answered, "I did not expect the like proposal from thee, that I should give my daughter in marriage to the son of a thrall. And so thou perceivest that my substance is decreasing; well, then, my daughter shall not go home with thee, since thou considerest her worthy of so poor a match."

Then went Orm home again, and each of the other guests to his own household, and Gudrid remained with her father, and stayed at home that winter.

Now, in the spring, Thorbjorn made a feast to his friends, and a goodly banquet was prepared. There came many guests, and the banquet was of the best. Now, at the banquet, Thorbjorn called for a hearing, and thus spake: - "Here have I dwelt a long time. I have experienced the goodwill of men and their affection towards me, and I consider that our dealings with one another have been mutually agreeable. But now do my money matters begin to bring me uneasiness, although to this time my condition has not been reckoned contemptible. I wish, therefore, to break up my household before I lose my honour; to remove from the country before I disgrace my family. So now I purpose to look after the promises of Eirik the Red, my friend, which he made when we separated at Breidafjordr. I purpose to depart for Greenland in the summer, if events proceed as I could wish."

These tidings about this design appeared to the guests to be important, for Thorbjorn had long been beloved by his friends. They felt that he would only have made so public a declaration that it might be held of no avail to attempt to dissuade him from his purpose. Thorbjorn distributed gifts among the guests, and then the feast was brought to an end, and they departed to their own homesteads.

Thorbjorn sold his lands, and bought a ship which had been laid up on shore at the mouth of the Hraunhofn (harbour of the lava field). Thirty men ventured on the expedition with him. There was Orm, from Arnarstapi, and his wife, and those friends of Thorbjorn who did not wish to be separated from him.

Then they launched the ship, and set sail with a favourable wind. But when they came out into the open sea the favourable wind ceased, and they experienced great gales, and made but an ill-sped voyage throughout the summer. In addition to that trouble, there came fever upon the expedition, and Orm died, and Halldis, his wife, and half the company. Then the sea waxed rougher, and they endured much toil and misery in many ways, and only reached Herjolfsnes, in Greenland, at the very beginning of winter.

There dwelt at Herjolfsnes the man who was called Thorkell. He was a useful man and most worthy franklin. He received Thorbjorn and all his ship’s company for the winter, assisting them in right noble fashion. This pleased Thorbjorn well and his companions in the voyage.

Chapter 4

At that time there was a great dearth in Greenland; those who had been out on fishing expeditions had caught little, and some had not returned.

There was in the settlement the woman whose name was Thorbjorg. She was a prophetess (spae-queen), and was called Litilvolva (little sybil). She had had nine sisters, and they were all spae-queens, and she was the only one now living.

It was a custom of Thorbjorg, in the winter time, to make a circuit, and people invited her to their houses, especially those who had any curiosity about the season, or desired to know their fate; and inasmuch as Thorkell was chief franklin thereabouts, he considered that it concerned him to know when the scarcity which overhung the settlement should cease. He invited, therefore, the spae-queen to his house, and prepared for her a hearty welcome, as was the custom whereever a reception was accorded a woman of this kind. A high seat was prepared for her, and a cushion laid thereon in which were poultry-feathers.

Now, when she came in the evening, accompanied by the man who had been sent to meet her, she was dressed in such wise that she had a blue mantle over her, with strings for the neck, and it was inlaid with gems quite down to the skirt. On her neck she had glass beads. On her head she had a black hood of lambskin, lined with ermine. A staff she had in her hand, with a knob thereon; it was ornamented with brass, and inlaid with gems round about the knob. Around her she wore a girdle of soft hair, and therein was a large skin-bag, in which she kept the talismans needful to her in her wisdom. She wore hairy calf-skin shoes on her feet, with long and strong-looking thongs to them, and great knobs of latten at the ends. On her hands she had gloves of ermine-skin, and they were white and hairy within.

Now, when she entered, all men thought it their bounden duty to offer her becoming greetings, and these she received according as the men were agreeable to her. The franklin Thorkell took the wise-woman by the hand, and led her to the seat prepared for her. He requested her to cast her eyes over his herd, his household, and his homestead. She remained silent altogether.

During the evening the tables were set; and now I must tell you what food was made ready for the spae-queen. There was prepared for her porridge of kid’s milk, and hearts of all kinds of living creatures there found were cooked for her. She had a brazen spoon, and a knife with a handle of walrus-tusk, which was mounted with two rings of brass, and the point of it was broken off.

When the tables were removed, the franklin Thorkell advanced to Thorbjorg and asked her how she liked his homestead, or the appearance of the men; or how soon she would ascertain that which he had asked, and which the men desired to know. She replied that she would not give answer before the morning, after she had slept there for the night.

And when the (next) day was far spent, the preparations were made for her which she required for the exercise of her enchantments. She begged them to bring to her those women who were acquainted with the lore needed for the exercise of the enchantments, and which is known by the name of Weird-songs, but no such women came forward. Then was search made throughout the homestead if any woman were so learned.

Then answered Gudrid, "I am not skilled in deep learning, nor am I a wise-woman, although Halldis, my foster-mother, taught me, in Iceland, the lore which she called Weird-songs."

"Then art thou wise in good season," answered Thorbjorg; but Gudrid replied, "That lore and the ceremony are of such a kind, that I purpose to be of no assistance therein, because I am a Christian woman."

Then answered Thorbjorg, "Thou mightest perchance afford thy help to the men in this company, and yet be none the worse woman than thou wast before; but to Thorkell give I charge to provide here the things that are needful."

Thorkell thereupon urged Gudrid to consent, and she yielded to his wishes. The women formed a ring round about, and Thorbjorg ascended the scaffold and the seat prepared for her enchantments. Then sang Gudrid the weird-song in so beautiful and excellent a manner, that to no one there did it seem that

he had ever before heard the song in voice so beautiful as now.

The spae-queen thanked her for the song. "Many spirits," said she, "have been present under its charm, and were pleased to listen to the song, who before would turn away from us, and grant us no such homage. And now are many things clear to me which before were hidden both from me and others. And I am able this to say, that the dearth will last no longer, the season improving as spring advances. The epidemic of fever which has long oppressed us will disappear quicker than we could have hoped. And thee, Gudrid, will I recompense straightway, for that aid of thine which has stood us in good stead; because thy destiny is now clear to me, and foreseen. Thou shalt make a match here in Greenland, a most honourable one, though it will not be a long-lived one for thee, because thy way lies out to Iceland; and there, shall arise from thee a line of descendants both numerous and goodly, and over the branches of thy family shall shine a bright ray. And so fare thee now well and happily, my daughter."

Afterwards the men went to the wise-woman, and each enquired after what he was most curious to know. She was also liberal of her replies, and what she said proved true. After this came one from another homestead after her, and she then went there. Thorbjorn was invited, because he did not wish to remain at home while such heathen worship was performing.

The weather soon improved when once spring began, as Thorbjorg had said, Thorbjorn made ready his ship, and went on until he came to Brattahlid (the steep slope). Eirik received him with the utmost cordiality, saying he had done well to come there. Thorbjorn and his family were with him during the winter. And in the following spring Eirik gave to Thorbjorn land at Stokknes, and handsome farm buildings were there built for him, and he dwelt there afterwards.

Chapter 5

Eirik had a wife who was named Thjodhild, and two sons; the one was named Thorstein, and the other Leif. These sons of Eirik were both promising men. Thorstein was then at home with his father; and there was at that time no man in Greenland who was thought so highly of as he. Leif had sailed to Norway, and was there with King Olaf Tryggvason.

Now, when Leif sailed from Greenland during the summer, he and his men were driven out of their course to the Sudreyjar. They were slow in getting a favourable wind from this place, and they stayed there a long time during the summer ... reaching Norway about harvest-tide.

He joined the body-guard of King Olaf Tryggvason, and the king formed an excellent opinion of him, and it appeared to him that Leif was a well-bred man. Once upon a time the king entered into conversation with Leif, and asked him, "Dost thou purpose sailing to Greenland in summer?"

Leif answered, "I should wish so to do, if it is your will." The king replied, "I think it may well be so; thou shalt go my errand, and preach Christianity in Greenland."

Leif said that he was willing to undertake it, but that, for himself, he considered that message a difficult one to proclaim in Greenland. But the king said that he knew no man who was better fitted for the work than he. "And thou shalt carry," said he, "good luck with thee in it." "That can only be," said Leif, "if I carry yours with me."

Leif set sail as soon as he was ready. He was tossed about a long time out at sea, and lighted upon lands of which before he had no expectation. There were fields of wild wheat, and the vine-tree in full growth. There were also the trees which were called maples; and they gathered of all this certain

tokens; some trunks so large that they were used in house-building. Leif came upon men who had been shipwrecked, and took them home with him, and gave them sustenance during the winter. Thus did he show his great munificence and his graciousness when he brought Christianity to the land, and saved the shipwrecked crew. He was called Leif the Lucky.

Leif reached land in Eiriksfjordr, and proceeded home to Brattahlid. The people received him gladly. He soon after preached Christianity and catholic truth throughout the land, making known to the people the message of King Olaf Tryggvason; and declaring how many renowned deeds and what great glory accompanied this faith. Eirik took coldly to the proposal to forsake his religion, but his wife, Thjodhild, promptly yielded, and caused a church to be built not very near the houses. The building was called Thjodhild’s Church; in that spot she offered her prayers, and so did those men who received Christ, and they were many. After she accepted the faith, Thjodhild would have no intercourse with Eirik, and this was a great trial to his temper.

After this there was much talk about making ready to go[17] to the land which Leif had discovered. Thorstein, Eirik’s son, was chief mover in this, a worthy man, wise and much liked. Eirik was also asked to go, and they believed that his luck and foresight would be of the highest use. He was [for a long time against it, but did not say nay], when his friends exhorted him to go. They made ready the ship which Thorbjorn had brought there, and there were twenty men who undertook to start in her. They had little property, but chiefly weapons and food. On the morning when Eirik left home he took a little box, which had in it gold and silver; he hid the money, and then went forth on his journey.

He had proceeded, however, but a little way, when he fell from his horse, and broke his ribs and injured his shoulder, and cried out, "Aiai!" At this accident he sent word to his wife that she should take away the money that he had hidden, declaring his misfortune to be a penalty paid on account of having hid the money. Afterwards they sailed away out of Eiriksfjordr with gladness, as their plan seemed to promise success. They were driven about for a long time on the open sea, and came not into the track which they desired. They came in sight of Iceland, and also met with birds from the coast of Ireland. Then was their ship tossed to and fro on the sea. They returned about harvest-tide, worn out by toil and much exhausted, and reached Eiriksfjordr at the beginning of winter.

Then spake Eirik, "You were in better spirits in the summer, when you went forth out of the firth, than you are in now, and yet for all that there is much to be thankful for." Thorstein replied, "It is a chieftain’s duty now to look after some arrangement for these men who are without shelter, and to find them food." Eirik answered, "That is an ever-true saying, ’You know not until you have got your answer.’ I will now take thy counsel about this." All those who had no other abodes were to go with the father and the son. Then came they to land, and went forth home.

Chapter 6

Now, after this, I have to tell you how Thorstein, Eirik’s son, began wooing Gudrid, Thorbjorn’s daughter. To his proposals a favourable answer was given, both by the maid herself, and also by her father. The marriage was also arranged, so that Thorstein went to take possession of his bride, and the bridal feast was held at Brattahlid in the autumn. The banquet went off well, and was numerously attended. Thorstein owned a homestead in the Vestribygd on the estate known as Lysufjordr (shining firth).

The man who was called Thorstein owned the other half of the homestead. His wife was called Sigrid. Thorstein went, during the autumn, to Lysufjordr, to his namesake, both he and Gudrid. Their reception was a welcome one. They were there during the winter. When little of the winter was past, the event happened there that fever broke out on their estate. The overseer of the work was named

Garth. He was an unpopular man. He took the fever first and died. Afterwards, and with but little intermission, one took the fever after another and died. Then Thorstein, Eirik's son, fell ill, and also Sigrid, the wife of his namesake Thorstein. And one evening Sigrid left the house, and rested awhile opposite the outer door; and Gudrid accompanied her; and they looked back towards the outer door, and Sigrid screamed out aloud.

Gudrid said, "We have come forth unwarily, and thou canst in no wise withstand the cold; let us even go home as quickly as possible." "It is not safe as matters are," answered Sigrid. "There is all that crowd of dead people before the door; Thorstein, thy husband, also, and myself, I recognise among them, and it is a grief thus to behold." And when this passed away, she said, "Let us now go, Gudrid; I see the crowd no longer."

Thorstein, Eirik's son, had also disappeared from her sight; he had seemed to have a whip in his hand, and to wish to smite the ghostly troop. Afterwards they went in, and before morning came she was dead, and a coffin was prepared for the body. Now, the same day, the men purposed to go out fishing, and Thorstein led them to the landing places, and in the early morning he went to see what they had caught.

Then Thorstein, Eirik's son, sent word to his namesake to come to him, saying that matters at home were hardly quiet; that the housewife was endeavouring to rise to her feet and to get under the clothes beside him. And when he was come in she had risen upon the edge of the bed. Then took he her by the hands and laid a pole-axe upon her breast. Thorstein, Eirik's son, died near nightfall. Thorstein, the franklin, begged Gudrid to lie down and sleep, saying that he would watch over the body during the night. So she did, and when a little of the night was past, Thorstein, Eirik's son, sat up and spake, saying he wished Gudrid to be called to him, and that he wished to speak with her.

"God wills," he said, "that this hour be given to me for my own, and the further completion of my plan." Thorstein, the franklin, went to find Gudrid, and waked her; begged her to cross herself, and to ask God for help, and told her what Thorstein, Eirik's son, had spoken with him; "and he wishes," said he, "to meet with thee. Thou art obliged to consider what plan thou wilt adopt, because I can in this issue advise thee in nowise."

She answered, "It may be that this, this wonderful thing, has regard to certain matters, which are afterwards to be had in memory; and I hope that God's keeping will test upon me, and I will, with God's grace, undertake the risk and go to him, and know what he will say, for I shall not be able to escape if harm must happen to me. I am far from wishing that he should go elsewhere; I suspect, moreover, that the matter will be a pressing one."

Then went Gudrid and saw Thorstein. He appeared to her as if shedding tears. He spake in her ear, in a low voice, certain words which she alone might know; but this he said so that all heard, "That those men would be blessed who held the true faith, and that all salvation and mercy accompanied it; and that many, nevertheless, held it lightly."

"Itis," said he, "no good custom which has prevailed here in Greenland since Christianity came, to bury men in unconsecrated ground with few religious rites over them. I wish for myself, and for those other men who have died, to be taken to the church; but for Garth, I wish him to be burned on a funeral pile as soon as may be, for he is the cause of all those ghosts which have been among us this winter." He spake to Gudrid also about her own state, saying that her destiny would be a great one, and begged her to beware of marrying Greenland men. He begged her also to pay over their property to the Church and some to the poor; and then he sank down for the second time.

It had been a custom in Greenland, after Christianity was brought there, to bury men in unconsecrated ground on the farms where they died. An upright stake was placed over a body, and when the priests came afterwards to the place, then was the stake pulled out, consecrated water poured therein, and a funeral service held, though it might be long after the burial.

The bodies were removed to the church in Eiriksfjordr, and funeral services held by the priests.

After that died Thorbjorn. The whole property then went to Gudrid. Eirik received her into his household, and looked well after her stores.

Chapter 7

There was a man named Thorfinn Karlsefni, son of Thord Horsehead, who dwelt in the north (of Iceland), at Reynines in Skagafjordr, as it is now called. Karlsefni was a man of good family, and very rich. His mother’s name was Thorun. He engaged in trading journeys, and seemed a goodly, bold, and gallant traveller.

One summer Karlsefni prepared his ship, intending to go to Greenland. Snorri, Thorbrand’s son, from Alptafjordr, resolved to travel with him, and there were thirty men in the company.

There was a man named Bjarni, Grimolf’s son, a man of Breidafjordr (Broadfirth); another called Thorhall, son of Gamli, a man from the east of Iceland. They prepared their ship the very same summer as Karlsefni, with intent also to go to Greenland. They had in the ship forty men.

The two ships launched out into the open sea as soon as they were ready. It is not recorded how long a voyage they had. But, after this, I have to tell you that both these ships came to Eiriksfjordr about autumn.

Eirik rode down to the ships with other men of the land, and a market-fair was promptly instituted. The captains invited Gudrid to take such of the merchandise as she wished, and Eirik displayed on his part much magnificence in return, inasmuch as he invited both these ships’ companies home with him to pass the winter in Brattahlid. The merchants accepted the invitation, and went home with Eirik. Afterwards their merchandise was removed to Brattahlid, where a good and large outhouse was not lacking in which to store the goods. The merchants were well pleased to stay with Eirik during the winter.

When now Yule was drawing nigh, Eirik began to look more gloomy than he was wont to be.

Presently Karlsefni entered into conversation with him, and said, "Art thou in trouble, Eirik? it appears to me that thou art somewhat more taciturn than thou hast been; still thou helpest us with much liberality, and we are bound to reward thee according as we have means thereto. Say now what causes thy cheerlessness."

Eirik answered, "You receive hospitality well, and like worthy men. Now, I have no mind that our intercourse together should be expensive to you; but so it is, that it will seem to me an ill thing if it is heard that you never spent a worse Yule than this, just now beginning, when Eirik the Red entertained you at Brattahlid, in Greenland."

Karlsefni answered, "It must not come to such a pass; we have in our ships malt, meal, and corn, and you have right and title to take therefrom whatever you wish, and to make your entertainment such as consorts with your munificence."

And Eirik accepted the offer. Then was preparation made for the Yule-feast, and so magnificent was it that the men thought they had scarcely ever seen so grand a feast.

And after Yule, Karlsefni broached to Eirik the subject of a marriage with Gudrid, which he thought might be under Eirik's control, and the woman appeared to him to be both beautiful and of excellent understanding. Eirik answered and said, that for his part he would willingly undertake his suit, and said, moreover, that she was worthy of a good match. It is also likely, he thought, that she will be following out her destiny, should she be given to him; and, moreover, the report which comes to me of him is good.

The proposals were now laid before her, and she allowed the marriage with her to be arranged which Eirik wished to promote. However, I will not now speak at length how this marriage took place; the Yule festival was prolonged and made into a marriage-feast. Great joy was there in Brattahlid during the winter. Much playing at backgammon and telling of stories went on, and many things were done that ministered to the comfort of the household.

Chapter 8

During this time much talk took place in Brattahlid about making ready to go to Vinland the Good, and it was asserted that they would there find good choice lands. The discourse came to such conclusion that Karlsefni and Snorri prepared their ship, with the intention of seeking Vinland during the summer. Bjarni and Thorhall ventured on the same expedition, with their ship and the retinue which had accompanied them.

There was a man named Thorvard; he married Freydis, natural daughter of Eirik the Red; he set out with them likewise, as also Thorvald, a son of Eirik.] There was a man named Thorvald; he was a son-in-law of Eirik the Red. Thorhall was called the Sportsman; he had for a long time been Eirik's companion in hunting and fishing expeditions during the summers, and many things had been committed to his keeping. Thorhall was a big man, dark, and of gaunt appearance; rather advanced in years, overbearing in temper, of melancholy mood, silent at all times, underhand in his dealings, and withal given to abuse, and always inclined towards the worst. He had kept himself aloof from the true faith when it came to Greenland. He was but little encompassed with the love of friends, but yet Eirik had long held conversation with him. He went in the ship with Thorvald and his man, because he was widely acquainted with the unpeopled districts. They had the ship which Thorbjorn had brought to Greenland, and they ventured on the expedition with Karlsefni and the others; and most of them in this ship were Greenlanders. There were one hundred and sixty men in their ships.

They sailed away from land; then to the Vestribygd and to Bjarneyjar (the Bear Islands). Thence they sailed away from Bjarneyjar with northerly winds. They were out at sea two half-days. Then they came to land, and rowed along it in boats, and explored it, and found there flat stones, many and so great that two men might well lie on them stretched on their backs with heel to heel. Polar-foxes were there in abundance. This land they gave name to, and called it Helluland (stone-land).

Then they sailed with northerly winds two half-days, and there was then land before them, and on it a great forest and many wild beasts. An island lay in the south-east off the land, and they found bears thereon, and called the island Bjarney (Bear Island); but the mainland, where the forest was, they called Markland (forest-land). Then, when two half-days were passed, they saw land, and sailed under it. There was a cape to which they came. They cruised along the land, leaving it on the starboard side. There was a harbourless coast-land, and long sandy strands. They went to the land in boats, and found the keel of a ship, and called the place Kjalar-nes (Keelness). They gave also name to the strands, calling them Furdustrandir (wonder-shore), because it was tedious to sail by them.Then the coast

became indented with creeks, and they directed their ships along the creeks.

Now, before this, when Leif was with King Olaf Tryggvason, and the king had requested him to preach Christianity in Greenland, he gave him two Scotch people, the man called Haki, and the woman called Hækja. The king requested Leif to have recourse to these people if ever he should want fleetness, because they were swifter than wild beasts. Eirik and Leif had got these people to go with Karlsefni. Now, when they had sailed by Furdustrandir, they put the Scotch people on land, and requested them to run into the southern regions, seek for choice land, and come back after three half-days were passed. They were dressed in such wise that they had on the garment which they called biafal. It was made with a hood at the top, open at the sides, without sleeves, and was fastened between the legs. A button and a loop held it together there; and elsewhere they were without clothing. Then did they cast anchors from the ships, and lay there to wait for them. And when three days were expired the Scotch people leapt down from the land, and one of them had in his hand a bunch of grapes, and the other an ear of wild wheat.

They said to Karlsefni that they considered they had found good and choice land. Then they received them into their ship, and proceeded on their journey to where the shore was cut into by a firth. They directed the ships within the firth. There was an island lying out in front of the firth, and there were great currents around the island, which they called Straums-ey (Stream-island). There were so many birds on it that scarcely was it possible to put one's feet down for the eggs. They continued their course up the firth, which they called Straumsfjordr, and carried their cargo ashore from the ships, and there they prepared to stay. They had with them cattle of all kinds, and for themselves they sought out the produce of the land thereabout. There were mountains, and the place was fair to look upon.

They gave no heed to anything except to explore the land, and they found large pastures. They remained there during the winter, which happened to be a hard one, with no work doing; and they were badly off for food, and the fishing failed. Then they went out to the island, hoping that something might be got there from fishing or from what was drifted ashore. In that spot there was little, however, to be got for food, but their cattle found good sustenance. After that they called upon God, praying that He would send them some little store of meat, but their prayer was not so soon granted as they were eager that it should be. Thorhall disappeared from sight, and they went to seek him, and sought for three half-days continuously.

On the fourth half-day Karlsefni and Bjarni found him on the peak of a crag. He lay with his face to the sky, with both eyes and mouth and nostrils wide open, clawing and pinching himself, and reciting something. They asked why he had come there. He replied that it was of no importance; begged them not to wonder thereat; as for himself, he had lived so long, they needed not to take any account of him. They begged him to go home with them, and he did so. A little while after a whale was driven ashore, and the men crowded round it, and cut it up, and still they knew not what kind of whale it was. Even Karlsefni recognised it not, though he had great knowledge of whales. It was cooked by the cook-boys, and they ate thereof; though bad effects came upon all from it afterwards.

Then began Thorhall, and said, "Has it not been that the Redbeard has proved a better friend than your Christ? this was my gift for the poetry which I composed about Thor, my patron; seldom has he failed me." Now, when the men knew that, none of them would eat of it, and they threw it down from the rocks, and turned with their supplications to God's mercy. Then was granted to them opportunity of fishing, and after that there was no lack of food that spring. They went back again from the island, within Straumsfjordr, and obtained food from both sides; from hunting on the mainland, and from gathering eggs and from fishing on the side of the sea.

Chapter 9

When summer was at hand they discussed about their journey, and made an arrangement. Thorhall the Sportsman wished to proceed northwards along Furdustrandir, and off Kjalarnes, and so seek Vinland; but Karlsefni desired to proceed southwards along the land and away from the east, because the land appeared to him the better the further south he went, and he thought it also more advisable to explore in both directions. Then did Thorhall make ready for his journey out by the islands, and there volunteered for the expedition with him not more than nine men; but with Karlsefni there went the remainder of the company. And one day, when Thorhall was carrying water to his ship, he drank, and recited this verse:

"The clashers of weapons did say when I came here that I should have the best of drink (though it becomes me not to complain before the common people). Eager God of the war-helmet! I am made to raise the bucket; wine has not moistened my beard, rather do I kneel at the fountain."

Afterwards they put to sea, and Karlsefni accompanied them by the island. Before they hoisted sail Thorhall recited a verse:

"Go we back where our countrymen are. Let us make the skilled hawk of the sand-heaven explore the broad ship-courses; while the dauntless rousers of the sword-storm, who praise the land, and cook whale, dwell on Furdustrandir."

Then they left, and sailed northwards along Furdustrandir and Kjalarnes, and attempted there to sail against a wind from the west. A gale came upon them, however, and drove them onwards against Ireland, and there were they severely treated, enthralled, and beaten. Then Thorhall lost his life.

Chapter 10

Karlsefni proceeded southwards along the land, with Snorri and Bjarni and the rest of the company. They journeyed a long while, and until they arrived at a river, which came down from the land and fell into a lake, and so on to the sea. There were large islands off the mouth of the river, and they could not come into the river except at high flood-tide.

Karlsefni and his people sailed to the mouth of the river, and called the land Hop. There they found fields of wild wheat wherever there were low grounds; and the vine in all places were there was rough rising ground. Every rivulet there was full of fish. They made holes where the land and water joined and where the tide went highest; and when it ebbed they found halibut in the holes. There was great plenty of wild animals of every form in the wood. They were there half a month, amusing themselves, and not becoming aware of anything. Their cattle they had with them. And early one morning, as they looked around, they beheld nine canoes made of hides, and snout-like staves were being brandished from the boats, and they made a noise like flails, and twisted round in the direction of the sun’s motion.

Then Karlsefni said, "What will this betoken?" Snorri answered him, "It may be that it is a token of peace; let us take a white shield and go to meet them." And so they did. Then did they in the canoes row forwards, and showed surprise at them, and came to land. They were short men, ill-looking, with their hair in disorderly fashion on their heads; they were large-eyed, and had broad cheeks. And they stayed there awhile in astonishment. Afterwards they rowed away to the south, off the headland.

Chapter 11

They had built their settlements up above the lake. And some of the dwellings were well within the land, but some were near the lake. Now they remained there that winter. They had no snow whatever, and all their cattle went out to graze without keepers.

Now when spring began, they beheld one morning early, that a fleet of hide-canoes was rowing from the south off the headland; so many were they as if the sea were strewn with pieces of charcoal, and there was also the brandishing of staves as before from each boat. Then they held shields up, and a market was formed between them; and this people in their purchases preferred red cloth; in exchange they had furs to give, and skins quite grey. They wished also to buy swords and lances, but Karlsefni and Snorri forbad it. They offered for the cloth dark hides, and took in exchange a span long of cloth, and bound it round their heads; and so matters went on for a while. But when the stock of cloth began to grow small, then they split it asunder, so that it was not more than a finger's breadth. The Skrælingar (Esquimaux) gave for it still quite as much, or more than before.

Chapter 12

Now it came to pass that a bull, which belonged to Karlsefni's people, rushed out of the wood and bellowed loudly at the same time. The Skrælingar, frightened thereat, rushed away to their canoes, and rowed south along the coast. There was then nothing seen of them for three weeks together. When that time was gone by, there was seen approaching from the south a great crowd of Skrælingar boats, coming down upon them like a stream, the staves this time being all brandished in the direction opposite to the sun's motion, and the Skrælingar were all howling loudly. Then took they and bare red shields to meet them. They encountered one another and fought, and there was a great shower of missiles. The Skrælingar had also war-slings, or catapults.

Then Karlsefni and Snorri see that the Skrælingar are bringing up poles, with a very large ball attached to each, to be compared in size to a sheep's stomach, dark in colour; and these flew over Karlsefni's company towards the land, and when they came down they struck the ground with a hideous noise. This produced great terror in Karlsefni and his company, so that their only impulse was to retreat up the country along the river, because it seemed as if crowds of Skrælingar were driving at them from all sides. And they stopped not until they came to certain crags. There they offered them stern resistance.

Freydis came out and saw how they were retreating. She called out, "Why run you away from such worthless creatures, stout men that ye are, when, as seems to me likely, you might slaughter them like so many cattle? Let me but have a weapon, I think I could fight better than any of you." They gave no heed to what she said. Freydis endeavoured to accompany them, still she soon lagged behind, because she was not well; she went after them into the wood, and the Skrælingar directed their pursuit after her. She came upon a dead man; Thorbrand, Snorri's son, with a flat stone fixed in his head; his sword lay beside him, so she took it up and prepared to defend herself therewith.

Then came the Skrælingar upon her. She let down her sark and struck her breast with the naked sword. At this they were frightened, rushed off to their boats, and fled away. Karlsefni and the rest came up to her and praised her zeal. Two of Karlsefni's men fell, and four of the Skrælingar, notwithstanding they had overpowered them by superior numbers. After that, they proceeded to their booths, and began to reflect about the crowd of men which attacked them upon the land; it appeared to them now that the one troop will have been that which came in the boats, and the other troop will have been a delusion of sight. The Skrælingar also found a dead man, and his axe lay beside him. One of them struck a stone with it, and broke the axe. It seemed to them good for nothing, as it did not withstand the stone, and

they threw it down.

Chapter 13

[Karlsefni and his company] were now of opinion that though the land might be choice and good, there would be always war and terror overhanging them, from those who dwelt there before them. They made ready, therefore, to move away, with intent to go to their own land. They sailed forth northwards, and found five Skrælingar in jackets of skin, sleeping [near the sea], and they had with them a chest, and in it was marrow of animals mixed with blood; and they considered that these must have been outlawed. They slew them. Afterwards they came to a headland and a multitude of wild animals; and this headland appeared as if it might be a cake of cow-dung, because the animals passed the winter there. Now they came to Straumsfjordr, where also they had abundance of all kinds. It is said by some that Bjarni and Freydis remained there, and a hundred men with them, and went not further away. But Karlsefni and Snorri journeyed southwards, and forty men with them, and after staying no longer than scarcely two months at Hop, had come back the same summer. Karlsefni set out with a single ship to seek Thorhall, but the (rest of the) company remained behind. He and his people went northwards off Kjalarnes, and were then borne onwards towards the west, and the land lay on their larboard-side, and was nothing but wilderness. And when they had proceeded for a long time, there was a river which came down from the land, flowing from the east towards the west. They directed their course within the river’s mouth, and lay opposite the southern bank.

Chapter 14

One morning Karlsefni’s people beheld as it were a glittering speak above the open space in front of them, and they shouted at it. It stirred itself, and it was a being of the race of men that have only one foot, and he came down quickly to where they lay. Thorvald, son of Eirik the Red, sat at the tiller, and the One-footer shot him with an arrow in the lower abdomen. He drew out the arrow. Then said Thorvald, "Good land have we reached, and fat is it about the paunch." Then the One-footer leapt away again northwards. They chased after him, and saw him occasionally, but it seemed as if he would escape them. He disappeared at a certain creek. Then they turned back, and one man spake this ditty:

"Our men chased (all true it is) a One-footer down to the shore; but the wonderful man strove hard in the race.... Hearken, Karlsefni."

Then they journeyed away back again northwards, and saw, as they thought, the land of the One-footers. They wished, however, no longer to risk their company. They conjectured the mountains to be all one range; those, that is, which were at Hop, and those which they now discovered; almost answering to one another; and it was the same distance to them on both sides from Straumsfjordr. They journeyed back, and were in Straumsfjordr the third winter. Then fell the men greatly into backsliding. They who were wifeless pressed their claims at the hands of those who were married.

Snorri, Karlsefni’s son, was born the first autumn, and he was three winters old when they began their journey home. Now, when they sailed from Vinland, they had a southern wind, and reached Markland, and found five Skrælingar; one was a bearded man, two were women, two children. Karlsefni’s people caught the children, but the others escaped and sunk down into the earth. And they took the children with them, and taught them their speech, and they were baptized. The children called their mother Vætilldi, and their father Uvægi. They said that kings ruled over the land of the Skrælingar, one of whom was called Avalldamon, and the other Valldidida. They said also that there were no houses, and the people lived in caves or holes. They said, moreover, that there was a land on the other side over against their land, and the people there were dressed in white garments, uttered loud cries, bare long

poles, and wore fringes. This was supposed to be Hvitramannaland (whiteman's land). Then came they to Greenland, and remained with Eirik the Red during the winter.

Chapter 15

Bjarni, Grimolf's son, and his men were carried into the Irish Ocean, and came into a part where the sea was infested by ship-worms. They did not find it out before the ship was eaten through under them; then they debated what plan they should follow. They had a ship's boat which was smeared with tar made of seal-fat. It is said that the ship-worm will not bore into the wood which has been smeared with the seal-tar. The counsel and advice of most of the men was to ship into the boat as many men as it would hold. Now, when that was tried, the boat held not more than half the men. Then Bjarni advised that it should be decided by the casting of lots, and not by the rank of the men, which of them should go into the boat; and inasmuch as every man there wished to go into the boat, though it could not hold all of them; therefore, they accepted the plan to cast lots who should leave the ship for the boat. And the lot so fell that Bjarni, and nearly half the men with him, were chosen for the boat. So then those left the ship and went into the boat who had been chosen by lot so to do.

And when the men were come into the boat, a young man, an Icelander, who had been a fellow-traveller of Bjarni, said, "Dost thou intend, Bjarni, to separate thyself here from me." "It must needs be so now," Bjarni answered. He replied, "Because, in such case, thou didst not so promise me when I set out from Iceland with thee from the homestead of my father." Bjarni answered, "I do not, however, see here any other plan; but what plan dost thou suggest?" He replied, "I propose this plan, that we two make a change in our places, and thou come here and I will go there." Bjarni answered, "So shall it be; and this I see, that thou labourest willingly for life, and that it seems to thee a grievous thing to face death." Then they changed places. The man went into the boat, and Bjarni back into the ship; and it is said that Bjarni perished there in the Worm-sea, and they who were with him in the ship; but the boat and those who were in it went on their journey until they reached land, and told this story afterwards.

Chapter 16

The next summer Karlsefni set out for Iceland, and Snorri with him, and went home to his house in Reynines. His mother considered that he had made a shabby match, and she was not at home the first winter. But when she found that Gudrid was a lady without peer, she went home, and their intercourse was happy. The daughter of Snorri, Karlsefni's son, was Hallfrid, mother of Bishop Thorlak, the son of Runolf. (Hallfrid and Runolf) had a son, whose name was Thorbjorn; his daughter was Thorun, mother of Bishop Bjarn. Thorgeir was the name of a son of Snorri, Karlsefni's son; he was father of Yngvild, the mother of the first Bishop Brand. And here ends this story.